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Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America.

WHAT MAY THE

Reformed Church in America

Be Rightly Expected to Do

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By Edward A. Reed, D.D.

In answering this question, we may consider the relation of our Church:

1st. To the basis of missions.

2d. To the lessons from experience.

3d. To the power intrusted to our charge.

Two prime factors enter into the call to missionary labor:

1. *The Divine command.* Everything starts here. The work of missions rests on no human foundation. The charter for that work has the King's seal upon it. We claim standing room by the side of the first disciples. "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." These familiar but remarkable words cannot be kept too vividly before the eyes of all disciples of Jesus Christ. For us Christians there

is no choice. We are not governed by a democracy, but by an absolute monarchy. We have sworn fealty to a King: One who has "all authority in heaven and on earth." The hand that bears the print of the nails holds the princely sceptre. Jesus Christ by true Christians is crowned Lord of all. By virtue of His kingly prerogative He issues the order to disciple all the nations. This is the charter of Christian missions —of Foreign Missions. If Jesus Christ be "very God of very God;" if His last command remain unrepealed, the question of missions is simply a question of obedience. The cause of missions rests primarily not on human reason, humanitarian hopes, apparent successes or failures, the ephemeral excitements of the hour, anything in man or his surroundings—but on a "Thus saith the Lord."

How does the Reformed Church in America stand related to this great truth? We answer: She is loyal to it. We prostrate ourselves before the person of the Risen Redeemer, and in humble but exulting adoration say, with the Church in all ages: "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ; Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father." By no body of believers, in no confessional statements of doctrine is the absolute sovereignty of God, in the person of Jesus, more insisted upon and exalted than by our own Church, in the words she has recorded: "He, therefore, is that true, eternal and Almighty God whom we invoke, worship and serve." A Church which worships Jesus Christ may be rightly expected to *obey* Him.

2. We have a second factor in this problem: *The Human Need.* Sometimes God gives us reasons for what He commands. Sometimes not. Obedience is not limited by our ability to fathom His purposes, nor our appreciation of their wisdom or benevolence. But when He graciously reveals His reasons we may study them. In this case Revelation is luminous. It

emphasizes the awful fact of Sin. There was a dire necessity for the mission of Jesus. He came to seek and to save that which was lost; and as the Father sent Him, even so He sends us. The love of Christ for sinners changes not, nor has the character of man changed so that there is no necessity for the Gospel—the good news of that love.

There has been marvellous progress in material things. Scientific research and readjustment have widely altered the conditions of life since our Lord sent out the seventy, since Paul and Barnabas started on their first missionary tour. We live in an age of wonders—steam, electricity, dynamite. Mighty forces for good or evil have been dragged from their hiding-places and compelled to minister to man. But alas! the new world of science is the old world of sin. It makes no difference whether men ride on the backs of camels or in Pullman palace cars; their hearts must be regenerated or they are lost forever. In Christian or heathen lands men must be born again, or they cannot see the kingdom of God. This is Holy Scripture.

How does our Church regard this awful fact? She *emphasizes* it. Nebulous theories concerning a future probation for sinners are creeping into some churches heretofore strangers to such doctrines. Speculations of this nature, if hardened into dogmas, will eventually cut the nerve of foreign missions. They flatter human pride and selfishness. It is a great deal easier to quietly, and with an air of superior gentleness and charity, consign the heathen to a second probation between death and the judgment, than to cut off luxuries, crucify the flesh, and deny ourselves daily to send them the Gospel *now*. Such theories find no favor with us. A Church which holds firmly to the Scriptural statements of the nature and consequences of *sin*, may be rightly expected to show heroic, nay, passionate zeal in saving sinners.

II. Let us turn, now, to the *Lessons from Experience.*

The foreign missionary work of our Church has been owned and blessed of God. If little progress had been made, our duty would remain unchanged; but since the Lord has been pleased to show us so many tokens for good, we should hail them with delight and gratitude. The churches she has established on heathen soil are the brightest jewels in the crown of the Reformed Church in America. She has held by consecrated valor one of the strategic points for missions in the vast Empire of China. She has planted schools and seminaries in Japan, to turn the intellectual activities of that awakened people into channels of Christian thought. She has won victories, under the burning skies of India, grander than Plassey or Porto Novo. Robert Clive, with his little band of English and Sepoys, risking all for the relief of Arcot,—shutting himself up within its walls, holding out against overwhelming odds for fifty days,—that he might conquer the Carnatic for England, is not such an heroic figure as that of our own Dr. Chamberlain, struggling almost single-handed at Madanapalle, refusing, at the risk of his life, to leave his post, that he may win the Telugus for the Lord Jesus Christ.

No one can estimate what a powerful effect our foreign work has had upon our home churches. Hope has sprung up in discouraged hearts as tidings of the Holy Spirit's mighty presence on missions fields have come to our ears. The conviction is forcing itself more and more upon many in our communion that a Church so honored of God, as to be intrusted with missions among three of the most populous and intelligent heathen countries, must have been raised up by the Almighty for broader and grander service than she has yet planned, must have before her a fascinating

future. Experience worketh hope. The lesson from Experience is a lesson of gratitude, courage, enlargement. We cannot forget that the blessings of the past have made the crisis of the present. The Reformed Church in America is forced by her very success in foreign missions to face the questions brought before this Conference. She may be rightly expected to give Christ the glory for that success and hail it as the peremptory order for a forward movement.

III. We have, as a Christian Church, a certain amount of ability, practical power, committed to our stewardship. It is not a question of rivalling the Presbyterians or the Episcopalians. It is not a question of size. It is a question of *fidelity*. It is for us to give an account for the 516 churches in our communion. God can make them 5,000, if He chooses. Those who are faithful over a few things, will be made rulers over many things. While, during the past few years, our actual membership has remained almost stationary, this paper would maintain that we have grown, and that we are able to push forward the mission work. Figures are false witnesses sometimes. They do not represent the strength of an organization. Gideon's army was much stronger when reduced to 300 than when he had 32,000 men. I doubt if any body of Christians is doing more honest work with its muster-roll than our own Church. During the past year 37 churches have revised their rolls. Our actual gain in membership during the year was 2,440. Our minutes—80,167, 1882; 80,156, 1883—show a loss of 11. Thus the 2,440 are swallowed up, and we are still 11 short of the number reported in 1882. What has become of these 2,451 Christian souls? Have they attained Nirvana—where they have no further concern with our Church or her missions? Brethren, those minutes show that 2,451 *live* men and women, boys and girls, have been put in the places

of 2,451 dead ones—dead to all intents and purposes, so far as the churches, from whose rolls they were retired, could command their money and their prayers. Has that weakened our Church? Is that to be used as an argument for giving up one of the dearly-bought mission fields of this Board? Three churches in the Classis of New York have, during the past year, placed 561 members on the retired list. Are those churches less able to contribute?

Again, the *family* is the unit of power. Our Church gained nearly 900 families last year. That is a great gain. Our benevolent contributions towards all objects increased nearly $24,000. These are tokens of good which the Lord is giving us to lead us on to nobler resolve and broader ideas of the possibilities before us.

Once more, the tide is rising in the Woman's Board. Any one can see that who attends the anniversary meeting or reads the yearly report. Our Secretary has reminded us that the general contributions have not increased as they should since the Woman's Board was formed; and he likewise emphatically added: "We do not believe, for one moment, that this is to be laid at the door of the Woman's Board." But at whose door is it to be laid? It becomes us who are placed in official position in the Church—pastors, elders and deacons—to search very seriously for the cause of this lack of service. Is it possible that the very zeal and success of the godly women in our churches, which ought to urge us on to grander conceptions of duty and privilege, have been used by any of us as an argument for indifference toward this work or a withholding of the Lord's money? Why should we not redouble our exertions because we have such loyal and devoted allies? It may be that God has raised up the Woman's Board to make it the instrument of wheeling every non-contributing church

into the foreign missionary line, and of raising up a generation which will never suffer any church to fall out of it.

Brethren, our churches are growing. *Intensive* culture is more than *extensive.* In Belgium they support a family on five acres of land. "East Flanders has and feeds 1,800 people to every square mile of her barren soil." There is a good deal of intensive culture being faithfully done. We need the extensive also, and will have it. Our General Synod has sounded the joyous note of forward march. We are going to leave the Mohawk and the Hudson—beloved streams as they are—and strike out for the Saginaw and the Mississippi.

What may we be rightly expected to do? Adopt the report of the Committee on Foreign Missions at General Synod. It was an easy thing to have the Synod adopt it. We want it adopted by each church and every member in our churches. That report was, substantially, this:

1. Hold all we have gained.
2. Reinforce these missions to the full.
3. Enlarge as God opens the way; and, in the name of the Lord, appeal to our people for what is needed—80,000, 90,000, or 100,000 dollars.

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